



# News Release

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**This news release has been edited to correct a web link.**

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## **Protect your health: pay attention to air quality messages**

*Stagnant winter air can make some people sick*

**OLYMPIA** — Winter weather in the Northwest means outdoor fun like skiing, snowboarding, and snow-shoeing. But winter stagnant air can pose a health risk for some people.

From November through March winter weather often causes stagnant air. During these months, air pollution from outdoor burning, wood stoves, and fireplaces gets trapped near the ground, where it collects. These pollutants can be harmful for people with heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and lung diseases; children and older adults may also be at risk.

“People with asthma and other breathing problems need to pay special attention to air quality, especially this time of year,” says State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “Often people with health conditions get sick sooner than healthy people when air quality is poor.”

Several burn bans have been issued across the state recently because of poor air quality. Smoke contains fine particles and toxic gases that can be breathed deep into lungs. Some counties in the state are under a burn ban. Before you burn, [check to see if your county is under a burn ban](#) ([www.waburnbans.net](http://www.waburnbans.net)).

Breathing polluted air can cause short and long-term health problems. People with heart and lung diseases are more likely to develop serious health problems. Sometimes, older adults have heart or lung disease that they’re not aware of, and it puts them at risk. Kids spend more time outside, where they’re exposed to air pollution for longer periods. Children’s lungs are more easily damaged because they’re still developing.

When air quality is poor, people should limit outdoor activities and reschedule them for a time when air quality is better. When people exercise, they breathe more air and air pollution into their lungs. If you decide to exercise, choose a less strenuous exercise such as going for a walk

instead of a run. And avoid exercising in higher pollution areas such as near highways or in neighborhoods with a lot of wood smoke.

People with asthma who use over-the-counter inhaler products like Primatene Mist will soon have to make arrangements for another inhaler. After Dec. 31, 2011, some commercial inhalers are going off the market; talk with your health care provider now so you have a plan.

Be sure to [check air quality](http://www.airwatchnw.org) (<http://www.airwatchnw.org>) before heading out for outdoor activities, especially if you're in a high-risk group. Often air pollution can't be seen or smelled, so it's hard to judge air pollution levels. More information about how [air quality can affect your health](http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/outdoorair.htm) (<http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/outdoorair.htm>) is on the Department of Health website.

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